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# Israel Was Reportedly Given Differing Signals by U.S. on Iran Arms Sales

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WASHINGTON, Nov. 26 — The United States has apparently sent Israel differing signals over the last seven years on the acceptability of arms sales to Iran. Sometimes Washington has vigorously opposed deliveries of weapons and spare parts to the regime of Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, and sometimes it has approved them.

According to present and former officials, the Administration has fairly consistently used the State Department to express objections. But at certain times, even before President Reagan's secret approach to Iran began 18 months ago, the Israelis have reportedly obtained tacit approval from the White House for small shipments.

Now, the Administration's secret overture to Iran appears to have been the product, in part, of Israel's growing role in shaping Washington's assessments of the Middle East's turbulent rivalries.

Increasingly, academic experts and former Government officials observe, White House aides with close personal and professional ties to Israel seem to have absorbed Israeli views on the ability of well-placed weapons sales or military action to influence the internal politics of Middle Eastern nations. The Administration's clandestine contacts and arms sales designed to bolster pro-Western moderates inside Iran, for example, had been strongly advocated by Israel from 1979 to 1982, and then again in the last two years.

The interaction between Israel and the United States, their wariness of each other's motives and their entanglement in the current Iran affair illustrate the extent to which "strategic cooperation" by the two allies has deepened in recent years. The concept — agreed upon at the end of 1983 by Mr. Reagan and Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir — involves joint military exercises, enhanced sharing of intelligence information and periodic meetings of a joint military committee.

In some measure, it is the result of a longterm Israeli campaign to portray itself as a "strategic asset" of the United States, a stable ally with a democratic system and an affinity for the American desire to contain Soviet influence.

But while Israel has made the argument largely to promote its aid requests, the campaign has also enticed Washington to make demands on Israel. At least twice the Reagan Administration has reportedly tried to get the Israelis to help the White House circumvent a Congressional ban on military aid to the Nicaraguan rebels, known as contras.

According to a former American official, the Israelis first declined to supply "bridging financing" with weapons

and training in 1984 and then refused to a request to "launder" and relay American funds to the contras. The Shamir Government was afraid of damaging its relations with Congress, on which Israel depends for military and economic aid.

Attorney General Edwin Meese 3d has now accused unidentified Israeli "representatives" of transferring profits from arms sales to Iran to the contras through a Swiss bank account. Israel has denied it, asserting that Iran made the payments directly into the account, not through Israel.

## Early Episode Described

An episode involving arms shipments to Iran was described today by Morris Amitay, who had just left his post as executive director of the American-Israel Political Action Committee in December 1980, after Mr. Reagan's election. He was approached by the Israeli military attaché in Washington, Gen. Menachem Meron, and asked to find out what the incoming Administration's attitude would be on Israel's selling weapons to the Khomeini regime.

Mr. Amitay quoted General Meron as saying that before Americans were taken hostage at the embassy in Tehran in November 1979, the Carter Administration had not been opposed.

Mr. Amitay went to Richard V. Allen, who headed Mr. Reagan's transition team and later became his national security adviser. "I told him that the Israelis had an understanding that they could ship small amounts of spare parts to Iran," Mr. Amitay said. "What is the attitude of the Reagan Administration?"

"He thought for a moment and then he said, 'Tell your friends I heard what you said.' To me, that meant they're not against it. In this town that goes as a wink and a nod," Mr. Amitay said that he had conveyed the sense of approval to General Meron.

Israel's impact on White House thinking has been enhanced, according to some former officials, by several National Security Council aides who are strong Israel supporters and are attracted by Israeli intelligence abilities and political analysis. Among them have been Robert C. McFarlane, Mr. Reagan's former national security adviser, who made a secret flight to Tehran last May on a plane with military equipment; Dennis Ross, the current Middle East specialist in the National Security Council; Howard Teicher, the N.S.C.'s senior director of political-military affairs; the late Donald R. Fortier, who was a Deputy Assistant to the President, and Michael Ledeen, who served as a consultant to the National Security Council.

## Supports Close Alliance

Mr. Ledeen, who was reportedly instrumental in the Israeli-American approach to Iran, is a founder of the Jew-

ish Institute for National Security Affairs in Washington, which supports a close alliance with Israel.

In the opening stages of the Iran initiative, Mr. Ledeen reportedly met with David Kimche, who was director general of the Israeli Foreign Ministry and had also been a high official of the Mossad, the Israeli intelligence agency that had maintained contacts inside Iran. Mr. Kimche is said to have put the White House in touch with an Iranian businessman who, American officials came to believe, spoke for the Iranian Government in urging contacts.

"We got sucked into some Israeli scheme," said a former official in the National Security Council. Initially, he said, the White House resisted Israel's support for using weapons sales in the approach.

"There was agreement that it would be good to have contacts with Iranians," the former official said. "There was disagreement over arms. There was agreement that if there were Iranians who could use arms to change the regime, yes. But to supply arms to the regime, no."

## Intelligence Gains Cited

The Israeli argument holds that cultivating Iranian military men can provide badly needed intelligence about events in Iran and may enhance the influence of pro-Western elements in the leadership that succeeds Ayatollah Khomeini. Given Iran's strategic importance as an oil producer, a barrier between the Soviet Union and the Persian Gulf and a counterweight to Arab countries in the region, Israeli policymakers have long seen Israel and the United States as sharing interests in maintaining channels to Tehran.

Israel found the White House aides considerably more receptive to this analysis than State Department specialists, some of whom express skepticism about the Israeli approach and cite the importance of American ties with Arab nations.

"I would think the Israeli geopolitical way of talking was very convincing to an Administration that has no policy," said Judith Kipper, a Middle East specialist at the American Enterprise Institute. "This Administration, which has tended to see everything through the Soviet dimension, really does not understand what is at work there."

She also accused the White House of "using the military as the first instrument of diplomacy rather than the last," a practice of which Israel has been accused as well. As in Lebanon, where Israel provided weapons to Christian forces to help them install a pro-Western Government in Beirut, the delicate mechanism of internal politics in the Middle East has proved less easy to manipulate than either Israel or the United States has expected.